What you should know on driving to the GDR border

Border between the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR

The border with the GDR is 1393 km long. Its history began on 12 September 1944 when representatives of the United States of America, the Soviet Union and Great Britain agreed on the demarcation line between the future occupation zones of the Western powers and the USSR, the line which today forms the border between the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR.

Along the border on the one side are the federal states of Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, Hesse and Bavaria, on the other side the GDR districts of Rostock, Schwerin, Magdeburg, Erfurt, Suhl, Gera and Karl-Marx-Stadt. Twenty-six rural districts of the GDR and nineteen districts of the Federal Republic of Germany are adjacent to each other.

Today the border can be crossed

- at 9 road crossing-points,
- at 8 rail crossing-points, and
- via 2 waterways (see map).

Four of the road crossing-points have been in existence since the entry into force of the Treaty on the Basis of Relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. They are for passenger traffic to the GDR including day visits to border districts of the GDR by persons residing in border districts of the Federal Republic of Germany. They are the crossing-points Bergen (Dumme) — Salzwedel and Duderstadt — Worbis in

Lower Saxony, as well as Eussenhausen — Meiningen and Rottenbach — Eisfeld in Bavaria.

Travel to and from the GDR

Inhabitants of the GDR can usually only travel to the Federal Republic and Berlin (West) when they have reached pensionable age, but since the entry into force of the Traffic Treaty on 17 October 1972 younger people from the GDR have also been permitted to travel to the Federal Republic on urgent family grounds.

Although a number of formalities have to be completed, several million people from the Federal Republic of Germany and Berlin (West) visit the GDR and Berlin (East) every year. The number of visitors increased considerably as a result of the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin and its supplementary arrangements, the Traffic Treaty, and the Treaty on the Basis of Relations which made day trips possible for people in the border areas.

This is illustrated by the fact that in 1971, the year before the Traffic Treaty came into force, some 2.5 million West Germans and West Berliners visited the GDR or Berlin (East). In 1979 the number was about 8 million. The growth of overall passenger traffic after 1974 was without doubt due to the cancellation of the previous increase of the minimum amount of currency which visitors have to exchange, the exclusion of old-age pensioners from this requirement, and the fact that the GDR authorities now permit visitors to use their cars without imposing special conditions.

The number of people in border areas using passes for multiple day trips (up to nine per quarter) was in 1979 about 416,000.

Day coach trips have also been possible since 1974 on the basis of agreements between West German travel agencies and the Travel Office of the GDR. Since 9 September 1976 the GDR has also stopped requiring motorists from the border areas to state why they are using a car. Border area travel has been extended to another five districts in the Federal Republic of Germany. As a result, the six million or so already benefiting from this arrangement has increased by about 1.2 million since 15 December 1979.

In October 1980 the GDR almost doubled (in the case of Berliners quadrupled) the minimum daily amount which must be exchanged on crossing the border. This regulation has also been extended to pensioners and children of school age. This is a severe setback to relations between the two German states.

In the other direction, more than 1.3 million old-age pensioners visit the Federal Republic each year, and since the entry into force of the Traffic Treaty (October, 1972) 3,000—4,000 per month under pensionable age on urgent family grounds. Urgent family grounds are births, marriages, silver and golden wedding jubilees, critical illness, and deaths.

Transit traffic to and from Berlin (West)

A considerable proportion of the traffic using the crossing-points is heading for or leaving Berlin (West). The transit routes from and to Berlin (West) are used by more than 15 million people a year. In 1979 about 18.5 million persons travelled on them; in 1978 the number was

16 million. This increase — more than double the 1971 figure — is the result of the easing of travel restrictions under the Quadripartite Agreement.

On 19 December 1975 the Federal Government and the GDR Government agreed on other improvements in Berlin Traffic (see p. 7, Arrangements).

Routes and crossing points for traffic from the federal territory to the GDR

Road

B 104	Lübeck/Schlutup—Selmsdorf
B 5	Lauenburg—Horst*
B 71	Bergen (Dumme)—Salzwedel
A 2	Helmstedt—Marienborn*
B 247	Duderstadt—Worbis
	Herleshausen—Wartha*
B 19	Eussenhausen—Meiningen
B 4	Rottenbach—Eisfeld
A 9	Rudolphstein—Hirschberg*

Rail

Lübeck—Herrnburg
Büchen—Schwanheide*
Wolfsburg—Oebisfelde
Helmstedt—Marienborn*
Bebra—Gerstungen
Ludwigstadt—Probstzella*
Hof—Gutenfürst*
Walkenried—Ellrich (goods traffic only)

* Also for transit traffic through the GDR to Berlin (West)

Waterway

Schnackenburg—Cumlosen (Elbe)*
Rühen—Buchhorst (Mittellandkanal)*

Agreements since 1971

The following treaties and agreements have helped to improve travel:

- Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin (3 September 1971)

  Civilian transit traffic to take place in the most simple and expeditious manner.

- Agreement on Transit Traffic of Civilian Persons and Goods between the Federal Republic of Germany and Berlin (West) (17 December 1971)

  This first government agreement between the two German States covers traffic to and from Berlin (West), with provision for expeditious treatment and establishing legal safeguards.

- Arrangement between the Berlin (West) Senate and the Government of the GDR (20 December 1971)

  Among other things, it has enabled inhabitants of Berlin (West), not counting the hardship cases, to visit the GDR and Berlin (East) again for the first time since 1963.

- Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic on Traffic Questions (26 May 1972)

Areas adjacent to the border

The area adjacent to the border is a strip about 40 km wide along the border with the GDR and Czechoslovakia from Flensburg to Passau. It accounts for almost one fifth of the federal territory and has 7.2 million inhabitants.

The effects of the division of Germany are still particularly noticeable in this area along the border with the GDR. The border has reduced the suburban areas of many towns and cities and cut off large rural areas from their urban centres. The big industrial and commercial centres in the Federal Republic and other parts of the European Community are a long way away.

Help from Federal Government

In order to compensate for the effects of the division of Germany, the area adjacent to the border receives preferential assistance with a view to creating living and working conditions, as well as economic and social structures, that are at least on a par with those of other parts of the Federal Republic. This policy is based on a law enacted on 5 August 1971 which does not provide for permanent subsidies, which would only create a semblance of prosperity, but for assistance designed to strengthen the economic independence and productivity of the towns and industries in the border areas.

The main emphasis is on industries and tourist enterprises which can attract additional income to these parts of the country, as well as small and medium-sized firms. Special importance is given to the development of economic infrastructure, such as industrial estates and the provision of tourist facilities, improvement of the residential and leisure-time value of the border areas, provision of more social and cultural facilities, as well as the improvement of traffic and communications.

Since 1971 the Federal Government has spent more than DM 1,500 million every year on these programmes. Below are some figures for 1979 by way of example:

a) For the development of industry:
   - grants for industrial investment* DM 143 mill.
   - tax-free allowances under the Investment Allowance Act* approx. DM 177 mill.
   - tax relief in the form of special depreciation allowances and tax-free reserves* approx. DM 741 mill.
   - ERP loans for medium-sized enterprises DM 342 mill.

b) For the improvement of economic infrastructure:
   - grants for investment by local authorities and other agencies* DM 140 mill.
   - ERP loans to improve the industrial attractiveness of the towns DM 6.7 mill.

   In addition, local authority infrastructure schemes were supported under the future investment programme.

* Contributions of the Federal Government, the Länder and, where affected, the local authorities

(c) For social and cultural institutions DM 175.6 mill. including
192 schools
112 kindergardens
273 sport facilities
38 vocational education centres
18 rehabilitation centres and workshops for the handicapped
57 youth work centres
8 establishments for older people
4 recreation centres
845 cultural measures

(d) A further DM 26 million was provided for public-sponsored housing schemes in border areas, over and above the funds provided under general housing programmes.

(e) A number of other measures have served to improve the transport situation: priority for the construction of trunk roads, preferential assistance for the building of local roads, compensatory payments for uneconomical stretches of the railway network, freight aid and gas-oil operating allowances for works haulage traffic.

These amounts do not include the funds provided for civic education, study travel, catering for visitors, information trips, etc.

A visit to the border area

A first-hand impression of the situation along the border with the GDR often gives the visitor a deeper understanding of the problems confronting the people who live in this part of the Federal Republic of Germany than do newspaper or television reports. Realising this, the Federal Government provides grants for organisations and groups who make study trips to the border area.

Not that the inhabitants of this area are being by-passed by developments in the rest of the country. The situation in those parts adjacent to the border with the GDR with the barbed-wire fences, mines and other lethal devices, is not typical of the entire border area, which includes such cities as Lübeck and Brunswick, Kassel and Fulda, or Bamberg and Hof. And the enterprise with the biggest turnover in the Federal Republic of Germany, Volkswagen, has its parent establishment only a few kilometres from the border.

A visit to the border shows more impressively than words and pictures the peculiar nature of the area — the fact that, apart from the crossing-points, it is totally cut off from neighbouring areas in the GDR, an isolation which the GDR maintains by every means, using ever more effective devices, including fire-arms. And even where the border may be crossed traffic is usually for a destination far away. It is through traffic and does not serve direct communication between adjacent border districts.

Minefields and various other installations, self-operating firing devices, as well as border guards with order to shoot, show how necessary it is to develop consistently the process begun by the Federal Government with its treaties:

"There is a daily observable discrepancy between the situation along the border and the aim of normalising relations and fostering detente. This can only cause one to doubt the reliability of the obligation not to use force and increase the fear of that force and hence ob-

struct the building of confidence. The principle of the inviolability of frontiers, an important principle of detente policy and of the Final Act of Helsinki, does not need and is incompatible with demonstrations of forceful means which permanently prejudice the foundations and prerequisites of the policy of detente."

(Egon Franke, Federal Minister for Intra-German Relations)

The purpose of the Federal Government's practical policy is to bring about a situation in Germany where the use of force and orders to shoot will lose their meaning.

Points to observe

In the immediate vicinity of the border

1. Groups should not travel without someone who is familiar with the area. The course of the border is not always easy to follow. So only approach the border at points where it is clearly visible!
2. GDR border guards are under orders not to speak to visitors on the Western side. They are carefully watched to see that they are obeyed. It is therefore pointless to try to talk to them, to vent your displeasure, or worse still to try and provoke them. In any case you would not be getting at the ones responsible!

The Federal Border Guard therefore urgently draws your attention to the following:

1. The exact course of the border is marked. The signposts with the inscription "Halt! Hier Grenze" (Halt! this is the border) are further indications put up by the Federal Border Guard.

2. Every person in the area immediately adjacent to the border with the GDR should therefore make sure exactly where the border lies so as not to put himself or others in a dangerous situation.
3. In the border area you are advised to keep to the surfaced roads and paths. Here the border is clearly visible. The border fortifications put up by the GDR can be viewed from many good and safe vantage points.
4. The regulations applicable in the GDR differ from those in the Federal Republic of Germany. It is a known fact that the GDR border guards are under orders to take extreme measures. Anyone who crosses the border in spite of all the warnings — even if he does so unintentionally or only for a very short distance — must realise the dangerous situation he is putting himself in.

Problems of neighbours

As you will see, the border runs in part arbitrarily through the countryside. Its course takes it right through the middle of towns, roads, rivers, fields and woods and follows invisible lines between the old boundary marking stones. The border not only prevents communications between the people, it also disrupts water and gas supplies, for instance. But it does not prevent the spread of fire and epidemics. In order to solve at least some of the problems caused by the border, it was agreed in a supplementary protocol to the Treaty on the Basis of Relations to set up a border commission.

Border Commission

The commission is composed of representatives of the two governments who by the end of 1978 had where necessary renewed or supplemented the border markings over a length of 1297 km. The commission is also required to regulate other problems connected with the course of the border, such as water management, energy supply and the prevention of damage. For this purpose it has to date prepared 6 inter-governmental agreements and over 20 protocol notes. The border commission began its work in January 1973 and produced its first results in September of that year: agreements between the two governments on the principles of preventing damage and maintaining and developing the border waters. 14 border information points have been set up at the crossing-points to ensure early contact with the other side so that immediate steps can be taken in the case of fire, floods, storm and mining damage, epidemic diseases, the occurrence of pest infestation, oil, air and water pollution, explosions, traffic accidents, and radiation. In June 1974 the border commission agreed on the course of the border and fishing rights in Lübeck Bight. In February 1976 agreement was reached on the supply of drinking water for Duderstadt, and in May 1978 on the Ecker Valley Dam.

And finally on 29 November 1978 a protocol was signed between the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Government of the German Democratic Republic concerning the review, renewal and supplementation of the border markings between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, border documentation and the settlement of other problems in connection with the course of the border. The agreement on the settlement of questions concerning the construction and operation of a basin on the Itz to hold back flood water entered into force on the same day. The border commission must continue its efforts to improve the situation in the border areas. It cannot resolve the fundamental problems and hardships in connection with the border, but by its work to date it has shown that it can give the people living along the border more security and generally help to improve their situation.

There is still a great deal to be done outside the field of activity of the border commission. However, the measures taken and the results achieved in recent years, starting with the aid programmes of the Federal Government and the Laender, via the treaties with the GDR which have eased travel restrictions, to the practical solutions worked out by the border commission and the negotiations on the exploitation of natural resources (e. g. coal and gas) on both sides of the border, have shown how the problems of the peripheral areas can be resolved.

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